



NTSB 2017–2018

MOST WANTED LIST OF

TRANSPORTATION SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

End Alcohol and Other Drug Impairment in Transportation



RAIL

MWL
MOST WANTED LIST

In 2016, drug use among workers involved in rail accidents is triple the incidence found 10 years ago.

What is the issue?

As the use of over-the-counter (OTC) medications, prescription drugs, and illicit substances increases in the US population, so does our concern about transportation safety.

Many drugs have performance-impairing effects, but determining the relationship between the presence of a drug in one's body and its effect on that person's ability to safely operate a vehicle is complex and often inaccurate. Although the metabolic effects of alcohol are reasonably well documented and understood, the diversity of drugs other than alcohol makes understanding their metabolic effects on human performance an ongoing and challenging task. Non-alcohol drugs can affect people differently and in ways that are not fully understood.

We have investigated many accidents in all transportation modes in which drug-induced impairment was a probable cause, contributing factor, or finding. Adding to our concern about this phenomenon is the fact that transportation vehicles are growing in complexity and placing greater demands on operators' attention. Operator impairments caused by alcohol or drugs place the public at risk.

US railroads transported 565 million passengers and 14.2 million carloads of freight in 2015. Rail workers rank among the most heavily drug-tested employees across all industry sectors; they are drug screened before being hired, randomly tested on the job, and tested following accidents. About 8 percent of workers involved in rail accidents so far in 2016 have tested positive for drug use, including marijuana, cocaine, ecstasy, benzodiazepine, oxycontin, and morphine. That number is the highest since the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) began keeping records in 1987, and three times greater than it was 10 years ago.

In the last decade, we have investigated two notable fatal train crashes—one in Woburn, Massachusetts, and one in Chatsworth, California—in which train operators or rail workers tested positive for drug use.

We are currently investigating four other accidents in which drug use was identified as a factor. Details of these investigations will be released within the coming year.



Continued on next page



Continued from previous page

What can be done?

Drug and alcohol testing has been required by the FRA for railroad industry employees since 1986. In 2016, the FRA issued a new final rule to expand drug and alcohol testing requirements for maintenance of way railroad employees who work on or near railroad tracks. Despite these regulatory efforts, much more needs to be done to ensure that employers create and maintain drug and alcohol-free workplaces, and that employees have incentives to arrive and remain drug- and alcohol-free throughout their work shifts.

In commercial transportation industries, operators and enforcement authorities must not neglect required post accident testing. This is the best way to understand the magnitude of the problem and to implement effective countermeasures to improve conditions for all who travel. However, to prevent drug and alcohol use from affecting the workplace, employees must better understand the safety-critical nature of their jobs, and they must be encouraged to take responsibility for reporting coworkers who are affected by or involved with drug and alcohol abuse. ■

The NTSB Most Wanted List highlights safety issues identified from the NTSB's accident investigations to increase awareness about the issues and promote recommended safety solutions.

The NTSB is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant accidents in other modes of transportation – railroad, highway, marine and pipeline. The NTSB determines the probable cause of the accidents and issues safety recommendations aimed at preventing future accidents. In addition, the NTSB carries out special studies concerning transportation safety and coordinates the resources of the federal government and other organizations to provide assistance to victims and their family members impacted by major transportation disasters.

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Related Accidents*

Date	Location	Accident ID
January 9, 2007	Woburn, MA	DCA07FR006
September 12, 2008	Chatsworth, CA	DCA08MR009

*For detailed accident reports visit www.nts.gov

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Critical changes
needed to reduce
transportation
accidents and
save lives.

